



May 8, 2025

Senator Patricia D. Jehlen
Chair, Joint Committee on Aging and Independence
State House, Room 424
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Thomas M. Stanley
Chair, Joint Committee on Aging and Independence
State House, Room 167
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Testimony in Support of S.472/H.783, *An Act relative to Massachusetts home care eligibility*

Dear Chair Jehlen and Chair Stanley,

On behalf of Ethos, a Boston-based Aging Services Access Point (ASAP) whose mission is to allow seniors and those with disabilities to age safely and with dignity at home, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on S.472/H.783, *An Act Relative to Massachusetts Home Care Eligibility*. This legislation would remove age barriers for access to state home care services for those living with HIV/AIDS whose disease-based challenges require more urgent care.

S.472/H.783 presents a cost-effective, socially responsible measure that would enable Massachusetts' vulnerable residents to access the care they vitally need. Due to incredible advances in medical research, the Massachusetts HIV/AIDS population is living longer, such that 65% of those individuals are above the age of fifty. While this is encouraging news, it is crucial that our state address the specific needs of this aging population to ensure their safety and comfort as they mature. As it stands, the current age requirement for state Home Care eligibility is a minimum of 60 years old, instituting a barrier for residents living with HIV/AIDS who may require services before that age that are critical to their health, wellbeing, and safety.

It is important to note that those with HIV often meet the clinical requirements for Home Care services well before they reach the age barrier of 60. This is due in part to the cognitive and physical health concerns caused by HIV. For example, cardiovascular and lung diseases, certain cancers, and liver disease (including hepatitis B and hepatitis C) are more common in individuals

with long-standing HIV. Moreover, HIV Associated Neurocognitive Disorders (HANDs) are believed to impact over half the HIV positive population: symptoms include deficits in attention, language, motor skills, memory, and other aspects of cognitive function that may significantly affect a person's quality of life and require additional support. People who have HANDs may also experience depression or psychological distress, increasing the need for the social interaction and wellness checks provided through regular home care services. Current state exceptions to the age requirement are established for those with Alzheimers or a related Dementia disorder. HANDs and other HIV/AIDS associated challenges can often mimic these symptoms and similarly require care before the 60 year age threshold.

Bill S.472/H.783 is not just the right thing to do for our population living with HIV/AIDS - it is smart, cost-effective public policy. Home care programming keeps seniors and those with disabilities in their homes and out of nursing homes longer. The median cost of a semi-private room in a nursing home in Massachusetts is around \$164,256 per year, but home care costs less than half that, with a median rate of \$62k. In many cases, Medicare or MassHealth ends up covering costs associated with either home care or nursing homestays, imposing additional strain on the state. Allowing older adults living with HIV/AIDS to age in place with the help of home care programs and foregoing nursing home options as long as possible saves individuals and the state a tremendous amount of money.

As a majority of the population living with HIV/AIDS in Massachusetts is aging and entering older adulthood, this becomes an increasingly pressing matter. Home care services, which include personal care, home safety adaptations, transportation, and health services, would significantly improve the quality of life for this currently neglected group of individuals. We urge the committee to move forward this economically effective, tangible increase in well-being for Massachusetts residents by issuing a quick and favorable report to *An Act Relative to Massachusetts Home Care Eligibility*, as you have done in previous sessions.

Sincerely,

Loren Singer
Chief Executive Officer
Ethos